

VZCZCXRO4725
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #2639/01 2201309
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 081309Z AUG 07
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2684
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002639

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/01/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: BAGHDAD: YAWNING GAP BETWEEN IRAQ'S PARLIAMENT AND
THE CITY THAT HOUSES IT

Classified By: POLCOUNS MATTHEW TUELLER FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Three prominent Baghdad-based members of the Council of Representatives (CoR) report that they have no impact on the most important issues facing their neighborhoods, including the provision of security and essential services. Aliah Al-Ubeidi (Iraqiyya - mixed-sect, secular), Harith Al-Ubaidy (Tawafuq - Sunni), and Dr. Mahdi Hafith (Independent) described frustration at the contrast between their ability to influence political outcomes in the CoR and their inability to influence the leaders of their province. None of these three CoR members have visited the Baghdad Provincial Council (PC), met their PC counterparts, or consulted with relevant PC committees; none could name their District or Neighborhood Council members, Beladiya director general, or Qa'im Makam. For fear of the local attention their position might attract, many CoR members reportedly remain anonymous in their own neighborhoods. Contact that does occur between the CoR and the Baghdad PC takes place along party lines instead of through institutional mechanisms. All three members responded enthusiastically to the notion of creating a Baghdad Caucus to help shift the focus of Baghdad's CoR members from sectarian identity to shared interests. The Embassy and Baghdad PRTs will continue to work to improve coordination and communication among the CoR, the ministries, and Baghdad's provincial and local governance institutions. END SUMMARY.

BAGHDAD'S COR MEMBERS CAN VOTE ON NATIONAL LAWS
BUT CANNOT INFLUENCE LOCAL ISSUES

12. (C) Three prominent CoR members from Baghdad report that they have no impact upon or input into the most important issues facing their neighborhoods and districts, including the provision of security and essential services. Aliah Al-Ubeidi reported that many Baghdad CoR members do not tell their neighbors where they work, for fear of the local attention their position might attract. During conversations in late July before the CoR recess, all three members described frustration at the contrast between their ability to influence political outcomes in the CoR and their inability to influence the leaders of their districts. None of the three members could name a member of their Neighborhood or District Council, their district's Beladiya Director General, or their local Qa'im Makam. They described fear of violent reprisal from local militias as the principle reason for their decision not to contact these officials. Aliah Al-Ubeidi said that her position in the CoR does not provide her the means to resist the local Jaysh Al-Mahdi (JAM) militia, who control security and provide services in the Zahra neighborhood of Kadhamiya where she lives.

SECTARIAN VIOLENCE LIMITS INTERACTION BETWEEN
NATIONAL OFFICIALS AND BAGHDAD LEADERS

13. (C) None of these three CoR members have met their counterparts in the Baghdad Provincial Council (PC). Nor have their CoR committees (Integrity Committee and Human Rights Committee) met with their equivalent PC committees. Aliah Al-Ubeidi said that she believes "there are no links at all between the Council of Representatives and the Provincial Council." She is unaware of any communication or coordination. Harith Al-Ubaidy and Mahdi Hafith also said that they are not aware of any formal ties or communication between the CoR and the Baghdad PC. All three said that they have not visited the PC primarily because of security concerns. When asked if he had ever been to the PC, Mahdi Hafith replied, "Who dares to visit there? We can't go there and they can't come here (to the CoR)." Harith Al-Ubaidy asked if the USG could provide security support for CoR members when they visit the PC. The new CoR security measures put in place following the cafeteria bombing, Mahdi Hafith explained, have made it even harder for PC members who seek to visit.

14. (C) Mahdi Hafith said that lack of coordination among different government authorities significantly impairs the state's ability to function. He said that various centers of authority in Baghdad deprive the province of the unified political leadership it requires, and make it hard for the CoR to focus its substantive consultations on particular governance institutions. Harith Al-Ubaidy, who serves as deputy chairman of the CoR's Human Rights Committee, claims to have launched a campaign to remedy the problem of inter-governmental coordination. His committee has begun to organize meetings with their equivalent committees in Provincial Councils around the country, including Basra, Babil, Ninewa, and Irbil.

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15. Harith Al-Ubaidy also lamented the lack of communication between CoR lawmakers and leading ministries based in Baghdad. He said that his CoR Human Rights Committee has begun to establish links to key ministries, including the Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Human Rights, Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Displacement and Migration, Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, Ministry of Health, and the Supreme Judicial Council. He has approached these ministries to ask them to assign a liaison to coordinate with the CoR Human Rights Committee on issues related to their ministry. Some ministries have responded, he said, noting that none of the ministry points of contact thus far provided have any training or background in human rights.

CONTACT ONLY OCCURS ALONG PARTY LINES

16. (C) Contact that does occur between the CoR and the Baghdad PC, Aliah Al-Ubeidi reported, only takes place along party lines instead of through institutional mechanisms. All three members reported that CoR representatives may meet fellow party members who serve on the PC. By and large, however, CoR members do not seek, in their capacity as elected officials, to receive substantive input into pending legislation from local representatives of the country's most populous province.

BAGHDAD CAUCUS

17. All three members responded enthusiastically to the notion of creating a Baghdad Caucus. "It is a beautiful idea," Mahdi Hafith said, "which will create interaction among people from various sects and backgrounds." He offered to host at his home a dinner for several Baghdad-based CoR members to begin discussing the concept. He added that a

group of CoR members came together July 25 to form what may prove to be the equivalent of a Basrah Caucus. Aliah Al-Ubeidi and Harith Al-Ubaidy also expressed support for a Baghdad Caucus. Harith Al-Ubaidy questioned, however, whether Baghdad's more extreme CoR members would permit the development of such a grouping. Mahdi Hafith argued that the present climate may present a "unique opportunity" to transcend the current party lists through groupings based on shared interests instead of sectarian identity.

POL AND PRTs TO PRESS FOR BETTER
COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION

18. (C) The Embassy and Baghdad PRTs -- potentially drawing on NDI or IRI -- will continue to work to improve coordination and communication among the CoR, the ministries, and Baghdad's various governance institutions. The PRT's local governance program has already begun to bridge the gap by significantly developing the capacity of Iraq's Local Governance Association to lobby at the PC and the CoR.
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